United Nations E/CN.6/2012/NGO/50

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
2 December 2011

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-sixth session
27 February-9 March 2012
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by Pax Romana, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

11-61928 (E) 050112

Please recycle

Statement

Introduction

As States struggle with violence, poverty and unemployment, education is being acknowledged as a successful and sustainable solution for many social ills. Nevertheless, the global economic and financial crisis has made an impact on Governments everywhere. Most importantly, this crisis has demonstrated that women are a particularly vulnerable group. More than ever, Governments are being challenged to prove their commitment to the development of women and girls through their support of education, and now, more than ever, the world needs strong coordination to empower women and girls as a way to alleviate the economic crisis. With regard to the implementation of internationally agreed goals and commitments regarding education, Pax Romana believes that Governments must carry out the important task of ensuring that these goals actually influence domestic policy.

Policy

The multifaceted benefits of an education have been acknowledged by Member States. That is a commendable initial step. It is time to turn words into action, especially in regard to women and girls. We call on Member States to place education as a higher priority in their budgets than they currently do. It is unfair to create expectations and demand high results of schooling without providing schools with the tools to succeed in their work. Also, when girls are not allowed to fully enjoy their right to an education, they are prevented from becoming part of the solution to many social problems.

It is the unfortunate reality of many States caught in the centre of violence and war that the atmosphere is often not safe or conducive to learning. Young women and girls are especially susceptible to falling victim to violence in conflict zones. To curb the risk of losing students to a culture of violence, steps must be taken to make schools safe for children to attend. A commitment must be made to the young people who have not had a role in creating the dangerous situations in their countries.

The United Nations development agenda refers to the needs of women and girls regarding education, employment and many other issues. This extends into the general wage gap between men and women. The reality is that female-dominated professions are paid less than traditionally male-dominated professions. The teaching profession is generally considered female-dominated, but the average salary of a teacher does not come close to compensating the amount of time involved in preparations, teaching and evaluations. The salaries and benefits of educators are not only insufficient but also, because many Governments are cutting spending, are constantly being challenged. There should be a commitment to acknowledging the value of teachers through salary increases and a greater respect for their work.

Two thirds of the world's uneducated children are girls. This reality of young women and the obstacles they face before even entering a classroom must be addressed to ensure that the goal of education for all is truly upheld. Girls and women everywhere must be provided with equal access to education and a safe learning environment.

Schools

Schools must aim for the accommodation and success of all students, regardless of gender. Moreover, it is critical that schools be provided the resources necessary to make this opportunity for educational equality a reality.

Those pursuing a career in education must be better prepared for the evolving classroom. Teacher education programmes should offer courses that allow potential teachers to understand how to serve all of their students in the best manner possible, especially young women and girls. If teachers take courses that provide them with concrete methods of bringing gender equality to classrooms, the long-term benefits for students, classrooms, schools and societies are immeasurable.

It seems that in more and more countries, the education field has been placed behind many other professions in terms of wages. Owing to the fact that teachers earn their wages by producing educated students and not tangible money-making products, their work is not compensated in a way that matches teachers' value to society. Teachers must be treated better by their schools and Governments because they are shaping the future generation of women and men.

Recommendations

In conclusion, Pax Romana makes the recommendations set out below.

The focus of educating women and girls must not fall victim to the economic crisis. Instead of cutting spending on education, this is the opportune moment to invest more in the education of women and girls. Education has become politicized by many Governments, and priority has not been put on students. Long-term vision rather than immediate results will help to eradicate poverty and encourage the realization of many other goals. Without the proper funding directed towards the educational needs of women and girls, the cycles of poverty and unemployment will claim more victims.

Since the commitment was made in 2000 to the Millennium Development Goals, the world has yet to see major improvement in many of the priorities agreed upon by Member States. While there are States that have achieved some goals, there remain many areas that still have a major need for change but have little time remaining to achieve all goals by 2015. We therefore implore Member States to concentrate on the education of women and girls because of the effect this achievement would have on realizing many of the other goals. Through this endeavour, improvements would be seen across many different areas of need.

In places where discrimination against women and girls is an issue, Governments should work harder to ensure that nobody is denied her right to an education. Domestic laws that seek to empower women and girls in terms of education must be reinforced through legislation and action on the part of Government. It is necessary to promote the empowerment of women and girls in order for the benefits of education to have their full effect.

Countries should ensure that women and girls have a voice in national debates, especially in the development of educational policies. Participating in this process allows women and girls to take ownership of their future. The establishment of gender-balanced national youth councils that are independent from the Government would ensure that the voice of even the most vulnerable group is heard.

Every community is unique and has needs specific to its population and market. When considering programmes and initiatives to offer schools and communities, we ask that goals be shaped to fit the needs of each population. Through surveys of local businesses, community meetings and available data, it can be determined what would best aid the women and girls of specific localities.

The 2000 Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All states: "Partnerships between governments, NGOs, communities and families can help ensure the provision of good care and education for children, especially for those most disadvantaged, through activities centred on the child, focused on the family, based within the community and supported by national, multi-sectoral policies and adequate resources" (available from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf). A true commitment to the education of young women and girls by Governments can be demonstrated by following through on this statement.